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UNDERSTANDING THE CONTRIBUTION OF SATYA SHODHAAK SAMAJ AND NEO-BUDDHISM FOR SOCIAL AWAKENING

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ABSTRACT

Indian Civilization is the conglomeration of various ethnic traditions; Years of amalgamation and change have led Indian civilization to have, diversity of culture religion, language, and caste groups. Indian Civilization is the conglomeration of various ethnic traditions; Years of amalgamation and change have led Indian civilization to have diversity of culture religion, language, and caste groups.[1] The social reform movements, tried for the emancipation of these low caste people, before coming of these social reformers, many of the low caste people had chosen to come out from the caste system is by getting religious conversion, getting converted either to Christianity or to Islam, prior to these social reformers the saints like Kabir, Ravidas, Namdev, like wise and many other fought for the abolition of the caste system and emancipate the low caste from the social bondages.[2] The other way for the untouchables was to get converted to either Islam or to Christianity, this was to get rid of the bondages of the humiliations of the caste system, but the conversion was not confined to the weaker sections, but in the medieval period too many people got converted to Islam or Christianity either by force or by their will. Jyotiba Phule was though born in Hindu religion in backward caste family, was earlier was not against Hinduism, but some encounter with the Brahminical arrogance shaped the outlook of the Jyotiba Phule towards Hinduism, Jyotiba Phule was insulted by Brahmin for his audacity in joining a Brahmin marriage procession.[3] To fight against the Brahmanism, Phule viewed the unity among the Sudras and the Adi-Shudras is necessary Phule, Phule wanted basic changes in the society. Instead of fighting against the caste

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INTRODUCTION

constitute, and fighting against the overwhelming power of the majority, the lower caste should find their own path outside the Brahminical fold, and form a new society, on the principles of equity and casteless, rationality and justice. Phule identifies that the Brahmanas, were very apprehensive regarding their social status and position, that the reason, they made themselves, Bhudev (God of the Earth) in his book Shetkaryanche Asuda Phule has written about this even Phule was the first to decode the myths, the myth of King Baliraja. By interpreting and decoding the myth, Phule wants to make the people aware, that how the Brahmanas have fooled the people over the years.[4] The Brahmins did provide justice to the people in everyday matters, but also let them appropriate a position more dignified than that of belongings. Phule's attack on Brahmanism was unbending. Jyotiba Phule understood that the roots of Brahminical supremacy and privileges lies in

the Scriptures like the Smritis, Shastras, Puranas like Brahminical text, and these text works and the caste system were created to exploit the lower castes. Jyotiba Phule also interpreted sacred religious literature and attacked the Brahminical scriptures and Puranas, revolted against priest-craft and the caste system and launched social movement for the liberation of Sudras, Ati-Sudras and women.[5] Phule realized that the hold of religious tradition and customs on the people derived from the wide-ranging integration of Hindu religious literature into the popular culture and oral traditions. Thus, to bring the awakening in the society, Jyotiba Phule started propagating his views, through various means like speaking in the public meeting, starting the school for the girls and for the untouchables, speaking to the people regarding the importance of education for eradication of the ignorance and unawareness among the people and encouraging the lower castes to educate their children, and to change themselves from following the evil customs, wicked predispositions and crafty precepts imposed on them in the name of God by Brahmin priests.[6] Jotirao tried to unite his followers and workers, so that they might integrate his rational ideas and bring them into effect. It was his aim to show the government how the peasants and other laboring sections of society were being exploited by the upper castes. Jyotiba Phule knew very well knew that the upper castes, especially the Brahmins, would not easily give up their supremacy. There was no question of their expecting that the Brahmanas will have any mercy or willingness to give Social, economic and political rights to the peasants and toiling masses, as these masses had no strength and organization behind them. Soon, he decided to set up an organization to propagate his ideology which he named as 'Satya Shodhak Samaj' for that reason, Jyotiba Phule arranged a meeting on 24 September 1873 for all his followers at Poona. In this meeting Phule made the people understand the need of the central institution, which will provide path for the movement. After few meetings and gatherings with the people, finally it was decided to awaken and enlighten the masses, and to free them, from the clutches of the Brahmanism, a new society to be formed named as the Satya Shodhak Samaj (Truth Seeking Society). The main objective of the Samaj emancipated the Sudras, Women and Ati-Sudras.**7**

The Chief Principles of Satya Sodhak Samaj Were Stated as Follows:

- All men are the children of God, who is thus their parent.
- As there is, no necessity of an intermediary to approach one's mother or to please one's father, there is no need of an intermediary such as a priest or a preceptor to enable the devotee to offer prayers to God. (Anyone accepting these principles qualified to be member of the Satya Sodhak Samaj.
- To spread truth and right thinking among people, make them aware about their rights and social problems.
- To overcome ignorance and became aware and give importance to education
- To make diligent effort to spread education among women and children, and to educate the farmers and train them to make use of Science and new technology in farming, and Agricultural implementation.
- To save Sudras and Ati-Sudras from long and sustained slavery.
- To make the Sudras and Ati-Sudras aware of their rights.
- To enable them to come out of influence of the Hindu texts.
- To promote unity and brotherhood among Sudras and Ati-Sudras.
- To fight against domination, exploitation and inequality in society.[8]

- To make an ideal society which will have faith in one god, also there should be no intermediary between man and god, and no distinction to be made on the basis of birth, every man to be judged by his qualities and not by caste.
- Phule in his Satya Shodhak Samaj, invited people from all the caste, class and gender, there was no discrimination on basis of caste, people of various castes were members of the satya Shodhak Samaj like Mahar, Mang, Kunbi Maratha, Maratha, Brahmin, even Jews and Muslims were part of this Samaj. The Samaj emphasized on education for the people, dislodging Brahmin priests from the position they held in the religious field, and freeing people from the belief in astrology and idol worship.
- Phule tried to bring all labouring classes under an umbrella organization to wage a morality-driven and knowledge-based struggle against falsehood. While rejecting the notions of high and low, pure and polluted, inhuman, aggressive and oppressive nature of Brahmanism, 'Phule preached his idea of universal brotherhood.[10]
- By spreading education Phule want to lead society towards Cultural Revolution. One aspect of his rationalism can be seen in the Satya Sodhak Samaj with its primary emphasis on truth seeking. It is most significant in this context as truth seeking was seen as a quest guided by the individual's own reason, not by the dictates of any religious guru authoritative text.
- Socio-religious contributor, Phule established the Samaj with the aim of securing social justice for the weaker sections of the society. He set up a number of schools and orphanages for the children and women belonging to all castes.[11]
- Phule collected money for the establishment of schools for Mahar and Mang children.
- He called for applications from students for scholarships and granted scholarships to ten students which was greatly appreciated and applauded by the non-brahmins.
- The Samaj made serious efforts to admit a few non-brahmin poor students in engineering college in free seats. The Samaj set up the first schools for girls and untouchables.[12]
- Phule collected money from contractors and surgeons and they promised to stop spending money on feasts to Brahmins and donated the money to the Samaj for the promotion of education. Phule next turned his attention to the religious aspect of the mission of his Samaj. He decided to solemnize marriage ceremonies according to rules and resolutions of the Samaj. The main features of the marriage ceremony are that the bride and the bridegroom declare their allegiance and take vows composed according to the Samaj. The guests bless the couple. The Hindu marriage ceremony was performed without a Brahmin priest. Regarding the marriage of widows and child marriages, Phule questioned and criticized so- called social reformers like M.G. Ranade, Lokahitavadi Gopalrao Desmukh.[13]
- Manu treats women as Sudras or Dasas irrespective of their caste and varna. Phule was convinced that the family system must be reformed altogether. Phule opened orphanages for children and maternity homes for women.[14]
- According to Phule, the performance of any religious ceremony by a Brahmin priest for a member of another caste, expresses in a concrete form the relations of purity between them which makeup the basis for Hindi religious hierarchy. It is the Brahmin priest alone who in his ritual purity has the power to mediate between the human world and that of the high gods, and so it is he who controls the entre of Divine power in the world. For this reason, Phule felt that the employment of Brahmin priests negated the very principle upon which he hoped a

community of the lower castes would be based. Samaj actively encouraged marriages without Brahmin priests. Thus, the Samaj assumed a vital role as the ideological conscience of those who identified themselves with the lower castes,

- Whether they belonged to the Samaj or to one of the numerous other groups working for the uplift of the lower castes. The Samaj supported the Arya Samaj in its social activities.[15]
- Economic Contribution Under the leadership of Narayana Meghaji and Lokande, the Indian labour movement valiantly fought for the amelioration of the lot of the millhands. The Indian labour movement in its early stage was to some extent an offshoot of the Samaj. The Samaj voiced the grievances of both the peasants and the mill hands. The whole movement laid a certain emphasis on economic between betterment and social justice and also aimed to stop exploitation through religious rituals and social customs. Din Bandhu Sarvajanik Sabha was established in May 1884 by Krishnarao Bhalekar with the help of Jotirao. They met every Sunday to discuss social problems, and non-brahmin leaders addressed the meeting at Dr. Sadoba Gavadi's residence.
- The Samaj also collected money and sent it to Ahmadabad flood victims.
- Literacy Contribution Phule wrote many books on social problems on behalf of the Satya Shodhak Samaj. The Samaj organized essay-writing and elocution competitions on social problems and distributed prizes to promote awareness on these issues among the weaker sections.
- The Samaj worked for the spread of education with the help of journals like Satya Dipika, Subodha Patrika and Dyana Prakash.
- While reviewing the work undertaken by the Samaj, Vividhadnyan Vistar praised its role and it activities in different fields.
- Jotirao wrote many articles in the Din Bandhu on a variety of subjects, and then his lieutenants propagated those subjects in their villages and towns.
- Deenbandhu the mouthpiece of Satya Shodhak Samaj played an important role in Satya Shodhak Samaj movements.[16]

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's views on Hindu Religion and Neo-Buddhism is well known. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar born in lowest strata of Indian society and had faced social ostracism and degrading treatment very early in his life made him conscious of the inequality imposed on weaker sections by upper caste Hindus in the name of religion.

- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar asserted that discrimination was a byproduct of the caste system; hence the system had to be done away with. He noted with pain that inequality and hatred were the main doctrines of Brahmanism and the suppression of lower sections was carried out without remorse by the Brahmins, as then bounden duty. In every sphere, it was the Brahmins who enjoyed privileges like education, acquiring property and holding high posts in government services while the poor, downtrodden and the most oppressed classes of the so-called untouchables were denied every basic facility and accepted it as their inescapable fate. Dr Ambedkar that a religion which discriminates between its followers, is and treats millions of adherents worse than dogs and criminals, and inflicts upon them insufferable disabilities, is no religion at all. Religion is not the appellation for such an unjust order.

- The most frequently quoted line from Ambedkar is 'in his [Buddha's] opinion, nothing was infallible and nothing could be final. Everything must be open to re- examination and re-consideration whenever grounds for re-examination and re- consideration arise and believe only in those doctrines which you have scrutinized and of which you are totally convinced.

- According to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, man cannot live by read alone. He wants self-respect which is denied under Hinduism. Untouchables have discovered that conversion helps them as they will no longer be subjected to atrocities. Conversion to other religions enables the untouchables to gain dignity and self- respect

- While addressing a mass crowd at the All-Bombay District Mahar Conference in May 30-31, 1956 headed by B.S. Venkatrao, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar questioned his people about their religious life, and put forth his understanding of caste and conversion.

- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar prescribed 22 vows to his followers during the historic religious conversion to Buddhism on 15 October 1956 at Deeksha Bhoomi, Nagpur.

- These vows could liberate converts from superstitions, wasteful and meaningless rituals, which had led to pauperization of masses and enrichment of upper castes of Hindus. Many Dalits employ the term "Ambedkarite Buddhism" to design the Buddhist movement, which started with Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's conversion and many converted people called themselves as 'Nava- Bauddha' i.e., New Buddhists.

- Socio-Religious contribution it may be relevant to consider as to what has been the impact of Buddhism on its new adherents, the people who responded to the clarion call given by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar when he embraced Buddhism. They have got rid of their inferiority complex. They have a fresh sense of identity and a newly acquired confidence. What is more, the youth them have shed the old superstitions that had crammed their existence and have adopted a more rational view of life; and there is a new cultural and social renaissance which has transformed Buddhist youth. They no longer believe in pre-ordained fate or in any of the ancient rituals. They believe that only hard work, education and a rational approach can bring progress. Compared to high caste Hindu youth, their attitude seems to be firm, progressive and scientific.

- They follow different (different from Hinduism) rituals at the events of birth, marriage and death, have different prayers and Viharas, rather than Temples. That this difference, for them, is an indication of them not being Hindus. They assert that as Buddhist they have arrived at a separate identity. For in Hinduism they had no identity; now as Buddhists they look upon themselves with self- respect feel confident and capable of self-enhancement. They feel that conversion to Buddhism means the total rejection of Hinduism and the caste system.

- Economic contribution - As far as the economic status is concerned; there is a change among the newly educated Buddhists. By and large, they have remained economically at the same level at which they were before conversion. But the radical transition from blind faith to rationalism has given rise to tremendous hunger for education and knowledge among the Buddhist youth. This holds the key to their economic progress and has resulted in some betterment.[17]

- Political contribution - The Republic Party of India (RPI) was founded by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in 1955, on the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar aimed to unify different untouchable communities in a politically powerful group. This aim was never accomplished. With the help of the All India Backward and Minority Committee's Employees Federation (BAMCEF) Kanshi Ram hoped together and unite the scheduled castes and tribes and other backward classes and the religious minorities.[18] The BAMCERF is voice heard and to make the indigenous people revolt against the 'Aryan' invaders to fight Brahmanism, and defend the explained masses. Hindus nationalists from the RSS and the BJP are the targets of much criticism and all arguments revolve around the terror of the upper castes. The Dalit movement was launched in April 1972 at Bombay with a manifesto to combat the growing atrocities against the scheduled castes in the rural areas. The most fundamental factor responsible for the rise of the Dalit Panther movement was the repression and terror under which the oppressed scheduled castes continued to live in the rural areas. It has become the hallmark of the Bahujan leadership in Indian polity also as it has established itself as a national political party. A major section of the Bahujan leadership led by the BSP has propounded a new identity for the weaker sections and that is the Bahujan which of course is inclusive of the lower strata of the OBCs, and the Muslims which no doubt are poor and laboring masses. It has repeatedly avowed that caste, as a form of descent-based discrimination, falls within the definition of racial Discrimination under Article-15(1), of the international convention on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination. The Literary Contribution Most of the Dalit writers belong to the neo-Buddhist community. Young writers like Daya Pawar, Shankar Rao Kharat, Keshav Meshram, Yeshwanth Manohar, Hira Bansode, Kumud Pawde and Namdeo Dhasal protested against oppression by the superior castes in their writings. In all their writings, in varying degrees of explicitness, there runs sentiment of revolt against the forces of oppression, and assertion of the right to a decent and dignified life. Various magazines and journals are being published by Neo-Buddhists like Dhammamegha, Buddhayana Yuga, Udbodhana, The Bahujan Voice, and Mulnivasi Times'.[19]

Both the social reformers, new that the religion is the essence of every being, and if that religion, is stagnant, suppressive, Non-Humanistic and immersed in evil practices will not liberate the individual and at large the society, the religion is to be based on rationality thus both the Sarvajanik Satya Dharma as well as the Neo- Buddhism (Nav-Baudhayana) believed in rationality, and discarded the evil and traditional religion, this was in order to make a awakened society.

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